

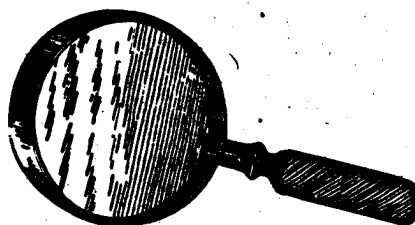
The Art Squad, Search-and-Retrieve

By Jo Ann Lewis

A three-person art squad has been formed to sweep the White House, Executive Office Buildings, Blair House and Camp David in search of 257 works of art, currently listed as "unlocated" by the National Collection of Fine Arts.

The search-and-retrieval mission is part of a new strategy adopted by NCFA following press reports last week stating that some art loaned to White House staffers since 1946 has long since been moved or removed from the walls for which it was borrowed.

The task force will scour the hundreds of offices involved as soon as the newly assigned members have been given security clearance, "which could happen within 24 hours after the names are received by us," accord-



ing to Peter Kyros, deputy chairman of the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities who is coordinating White House cooperation in the search.

Floor plan in hand, the art squad will "literally have to case every office in the new and old EOB, the White House, Blair House and Camp David to complete their job," according to NCFA Registrar Robert Johnston. "And if we find things that have

been sent or taken somewhere else, we'll hunt them down till they're found."

Dr. Joshua Taylor, director of NCFA, met with Kyros on Wednesday, just before leaving for a scheduled three-week vacation, and was assured "full cooperation" in the search for the 160 prints, 68 watercolors, 23 paintings, four sculptures and two pastels outstanding. Taylor had written Kyros earlier in the week formally requesting clearance and easy access for the art squad.

"We'll need it," says Johnston. "I've tried checking out items in EOB before, and I know what it's like. You can do it if you have the cooperation of everyone there and can move freely, but people in individual offices have had a real reluctance to let me

See SQUAD, B5, Col. 1

Enter the Art Squad

SQUAD, From B1

in. I think it would be easier if someone came with us this time, to clear the way."

Hand-picked for the mission (which could take weeks, according to Johnston) are the museum's associate curator of prints and drawings, Tina Norelli, and two members of Johnston's staff, Deborah Jensen and Thomas Bower. Donald McClelland, coordinator of the lending program, has been detailed to reconnoiter Camp David.

How would the denizens of EOB react if the art squad burst into their offices asking to see their etchings? "Well, I'd figure they must be following up on those pictures they lost over here, and I don't know what I'd do. I don't know how you could keep them out," said one. But, she added, "we really don't have anything in here worth looking at—at least it doesn't look very important."

In the wake of stories which appeared in the press last Friday, the NCFA has received two phone calls pinning down the location of seven works on the "unlocated" list. Four prints were reported to be hanging at the CIA, "which is where they're supposed to be," according to Johnston, "and three watercolors have been located at the FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation). These were signed out to the Executive Office Building in 1963."

The NCFA lending program to the executive branch began informally in 1929, and until 1975 made works of art available to various government officials, with no apparent guidelines. The same year the rules were tightened to include only officials of cabinet rank or higher, and borrowers were required to personally sign a loan agreement as any other museum would have to do.

Also in 1975, NCFA undertook an inventory of all outstanding loans to the executive branch, 496 in all. Since that time all but the 257 which came to light last week have been located or returned. Twelve items were returned from the White House in April, others in late May. Some have been reacquired and returned to the borrowers under the new strictures.

"You must remember," said Taylor, "that until 10 years ago the NCFA was only an office and a few galleries behind the elephant in the Museum of Natural History." The one storage room they had is now used as a nurse's office. "They were grateful to have some place to hang the works."

More professional and systematic caring for the collections began when the museum moved into the renovated Patent Office Building just a decade ago.

And does the NCFA expect that, after this grueling task, most of the works will be found? "I do, I really, really do," says Johnston, "but just in case, I'm keeping my fingers crossed."